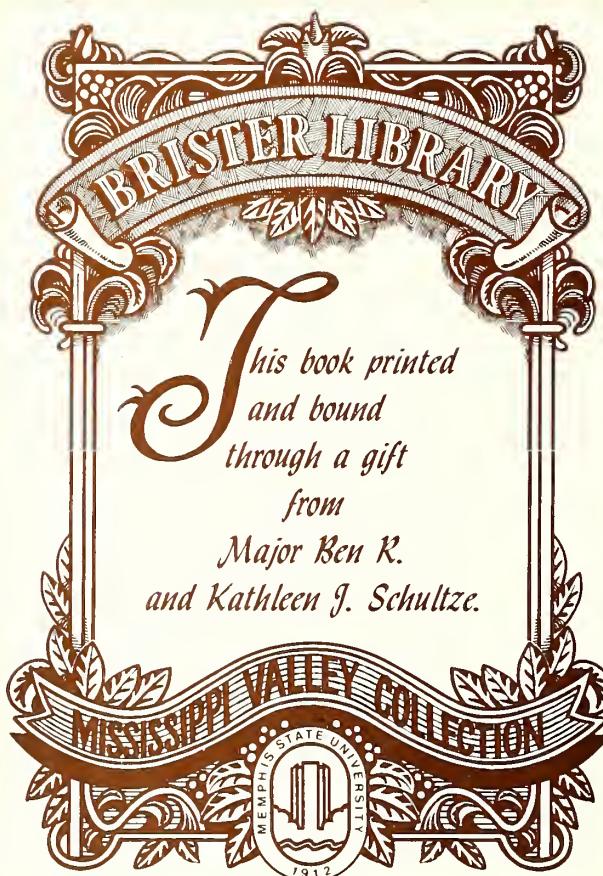


AN ORAL HISTORY OF WOMEN LEADERS OF MEMPHIS
INTERVIEW WITH ELINOR "B" BRIDGES

BY - ELEANOR MCKAY
TRANSCRIBER - CAROL LANEY
ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH OFFICE
MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY



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JULY 25, 1977

BY ELEANOR MCKAY

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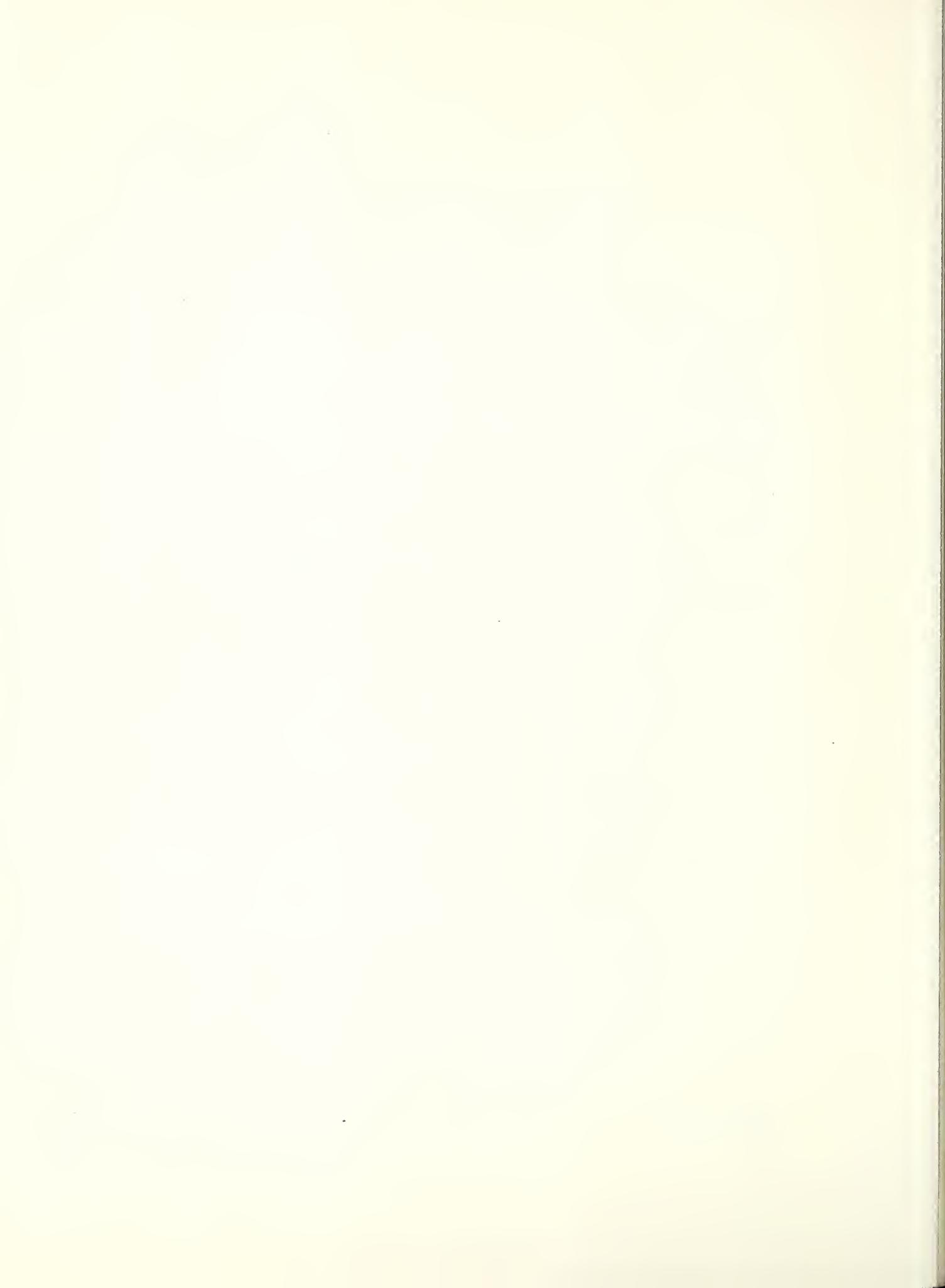
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PLACE July 25, 1977
DATE Memphis, Tennessee

X Elmer B. Bridges
(INTERVIEWEE)

Charles W. Cunfer
(For the Mississippi Valley Archives
of the John Willard Brister Library
of Memphis State University)



THIS IS THE ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH OFFICE OF MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY. THIS PROJECT IS "AN ORAL HISTORY OF WOMEN LEADERS OF MEMPHIS". THE PLACE IS MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE. THE DATE IS JULY 25, 1977, AND THE INTERVIEW IS WITH MISS ELINOR "B" BRIDGES. THE INTERVIEW IS BY ELEANOR McKAY, CURATOR OF THE MISSISSIPPI VALLEY COLLECTION AT MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY, AND WAS TRANSCRIBED BY MS. CAROL LANEY.

McKAY: "B", would you start off please and give us a short biographical sketch of yourself.

BRIDGES: Like most Memphians, who come either from Arkansas or Mississippi, I was born in Starkville, Mississippi, April 21, 1909, in a family which was one of the pioneer families in Mississippi, because I and my five brothers represent the seventh generation of our family to live in that state. We came there when it belonged to Spain. The only interesting thing I can think of primarily concerns my grandfather, born and reared in Webster County, Mississippi. He was an abolitionist and, in opposition to his family and the entire community, got on his horse and rode north where he joined the Union Army at Louisville, Kentucky. He came back to Mississippi, studied law and was in politics. Considering the opposition of that period, it was rather interesting, and we always boasted that he was a member of the Mississippi Constitutional Convention in 1878 when Mississippi was returned to the Union. He also donated some of the land when, under the Land Grant Act of 1878, the Mississippi State College, now known as Mississippi State University, was created. My father went to that school and, so did I,



even though women were barely tolerated on the campus and at that day and time they didn't have any dormitories. Co-eds had to live downtown and go out to school every day in a taxi cab. It's not as extravagant as it sounds--the cab fare was a dime. But, I went to Mississippi State and I majored in business. Although I have pursued a course in business, I'm a misplaced writer because all of my life I have done research and writing. The first job I had was with the college, and I helped to organize the Business Research Station there, and I was the first editor of the Mississippi Business Review which used to be quoted rather widely in the Commercial Appeal. We compiled statistics primarily on Mississippi business and Mississippi agriculture.

During my sophomore days I sold a short, short story to the old Liberty Magazine. And I would say that for any beginning writer, the worst thing that can possibly happen to you is to sell rather well the first story that you send out, because it was the beginning of what looked like a green period, but actually it was the longest, dryest, barren spell in my whole creative life. I neglected my college studies and worked incessantly at writing, but I didn't sell another story for three years.

Later I went to Washington, D. C. at my father's behest and called upon the late Senator Pat Harrison from Mississippi because he had been a friend of my father's in their youth. And he told me to be sure to go by and see Senator Harrison and tell him "you want a job, not in Washington, but you want to leave Mississippi State." So I did go by to see Senator Harrison and these were in the Depression years when the Farm Security Administration was very much in evidence. And, he picked up the phone and called the late Charles Baldwin, who was head of Farm Security



Administration, and he knew him so well that he called him "Beanie." And he said, "I have a young lady here in my office who is the daughter of a dear old friend. She's quite capable because she finished at Mississippi State and she has a higher accounting major, so see what you can do for her." I went over to see Mr. Baldwin and two days later I was on my way to Little Rock, Arkansas where I was in an audit unit which audited farmers' co-ops in Arkansas, Louisiana and Mississippi, and I stayed with that until the beginning of World War II. Then I went to work first with Chemical Warfare Service, and we were trying to set up a defense stance--the United States was not actually at war, but it was what was called the defense effort, and it sounds incredible but I worked seven days a week, on Saturdays, Sundays and holidays. When you finished one job, they put you on a plane and sent you to another one without any rest in between. And from there I went with the U.S. General Accounting Office, which engaged in a field audit. This field audit was to maintain continuous examination of war contracts. And that's where I made a mistake because I was batted around the United States like a tennis ball, having to work in 22 states in a 24 month period. I audited everything building P-38 airplanes, some of the work later at Willow Run, and I was sent up on the Alcan Highway where they were constructing through the Yukon at White Horse, Canada. I was at the arsenals: Pine Bluff Arsenal, Rocky Mountain arsenal in Denver, the one in Salt Lake City; I was even at the oldest one at Rock Island, Illinois. I was at the chemical warfare installation at Baltimore, just outside Baltimore, (actually it was Edgewood Arsenal). You name it, I was there.

Following the war, I audited the disposition of war assets and that



took me into everything. That's when they sent me to Nashville, and I was in everything from the liquidation of the construction of P-51 fighters at Consolidated Vultee to the Queen of Sheba School of Youth and Beauty where some colored WACS were studying beauty parlor operation under the G.I. bill. And, I also audited the advertising department at General Shoe. One time I went down and made an assessment of the damage when the City of Nashville had broken a water pipe on Broadway and filled the Southern Manufacturing Company basement and damaged 500,000 yards of blue cloth that belonged to the Maritime Commission. The years before, I had a paper-knife sharp memory, I could remember a name or a place. But after that, having met thousands of people under all sorts of circumstances, I lost that ability and now people's faces look like so many fish. I really have to identify a person with a thing.

As I said, the general accounting office sent me to Nashville, and during that time my father died and the doctor said my mother could not live alone, so I bought a house in Nashville and moved my mother up there. I was supposed to have stayed in Nashville for six weeks but they kept me there for four years.

Following the end of the outside audit and the pulling back of the GAO work auditors into Washington, I went to work for the State of Tennessee, and the job was with the Tennessee Health Department to set up accounting systems for what was then the four tuberculosis hospitals.

McKAY: Do you remember what year that was?

BRIDGES: 1948, December. I believe the date was December 12, 1948. I did work at setting up accounting systems for the hospital in Memphis, for the one in Nashville,



the one in Knoxville, and the one in Chattanooga. I don't know whether those are still in operation or whether they even used the accounting system which I set up. I can't tell you. This is pretty much the story of my career except that I went into business for myself and I have worked setting up accounting systems for small business and doing some tax advisory work. My work, now that I have passed retirement age, is limited only to old clients, and as they go out of business, leave Memphis and die, I'm not replacing them.

During all these years I have written; in fact, right after my mother died, I took two years off and spent it, moving around west of the Mississippi River. You name the place, I was there. And I wrote stories; a lot of them were accepted by King Features. There was even a promise, at one time, that I would have a syndicated column but it didn't come to pass.

McKAY: What time was that?

BRIDGES: This period was in 1958 to 1960. I wrote all kinds of articles and ran down all kinds of stories. For instance, I went to Mule Shoe, Texas, just because it was named Mule Shoe. I went to another little place named Waurika, Oklahoma because they told me that the National Rodeo Champion lived there. But I found out a lot of things when I got to that little place, such as, it was the dividing line between Oklahoma Territory and Oklahoma State for a number of years. And, this national rodeo champion had once been a prisoner of Castro's--all sorts of things like that. In fact, I went to interview an old doctor who changed Pretty Boy Floyd's fingerprints. He was in the Federal Prison in McAlister. I don't know why the warden let me talk to him except that the old man was practically dying and blind at the time.



He later died in the federal pen. So, I assumed that the warden thought, "Oh well, the old man is in his dotage and this is a female writer, nothing will happen." I got quite a good story from him.

And I went out to the Easter Festival at Lawton, Oklahoma, that's in Ouachita National Park. They hold a pageant depicting the entire life of Christ. It lasts all night, and it ends with His crucifixion just as the morning sun comes up. And that was pretty interesting to me. The batty people in Oklahoma wanted yarns from Fisherman's Wharf while the people in San Francisco ate up stories from Lawton. Some of the editors in Oklahoma loved stories from Fisherman's Wharf, but they didn't care anything at all about their own stories. You could give them the best story in the world from Oklahoma and they wouldn't buy it.

What finally brought me back to Memphis? I'm not sure that it wasn't a big mistake, because I was doing very well and was very happy, but I realized suddenly that I was no longer young and I had thousands of acquaintances and not a friend in the world. That's when I came to Memphis, decided to stay here and make such living as I could. After all, there are enough stories in any place, no matter how small, to keep you writing all of your born days. One thing I do know is that people want to know about people.

McKAY: What year did you come back to Memphis?

BRIDGES: 1960. You realize by 1960, I was 51 years old and needed to settle down. When you're after a story there is no use traveling on planes and there is no use in being dressed up. The way to learn about people is to travel on buses and listen to them. I have threatened many years to get a tape recorder to get the



stuff down. But I listen, and I pick up all sorts of dialogue, and later on I have a chance to use it; sometimes a phrase is just exactly right. I try to be unobtrusive about it, and that is one of the things I do when I have some leisure time in Memphis. I'll get on a bus and go in the back to sit among the blacks and listen to them. There is nothing on earth to do when I get to the end of the line so I ride back to town and get on another bus and ride to the end of the line and come back on it. All I'm doing is listening. I don't really care that much about people as people, but the ideas they have I really love. Also in riding that way, I get a feel for an area--even a different area in our own city--it smells different, it looks different, the people are different, even what you can order in one of the little greasy spoon cafes is a little bit different from one in another area of town. That is especially true as you go across the whole country, and I had lots of that.

Among the things I have done, I was very active in the Memphis Business and Professional Women's Club for a number of years and then later transferred to the East Memphis Business and Professional Women's Club. I'm a member but I actually joined Business and Professional Women's Clubs when I lived in Mississippi. I was a member in Little Rock, later in Nashville and finally a member here in Memphis. I was so active for a long time in the Tennessee Federation that I knew what every one of the leaders thought about every conceivable subject, where they stood, and what they would say, so I'm no longer very active. But in that time I headed every committee that particular organization has and I held every office except President, was on the Board of Directors for eleven out of thirteen years in one club and seven out of ten years in another one. I was a member of a national



committee at one time, a magazine study where I was on the board of The National Business Woman. Since that time, I occasionally write an article for them. I seldom have a whole year go by that I don't have an article in their magazine.

McKAY: What impact did that have on your career to belong to these business and professional women's clubs?

BRIDGES: Well, that's how I got the friends I didn't have in the past where I had merely pleasant acquaintances. But I could tell you, that life, when you are traveling, wasn't always so dull. I know, one time a Colonel in Chemical Warfare Service flew me in a plane from Pine Bluff, Arkansas to Chicago just to teach his wife how to make an angel food cake. And, another time we went down to Hope Proving Grounds to test in sandy areas the accuracy of some of the clustered bombs that had been manufactured at Pine Bluff. It was Christmas Day, and there wasn't a place in the world to eat at Hope, and those little towns were all closed. We came back that night and couldn't find anything open in Pine Bluff, so we went over to some engineer's boats on the Arkansas River, and the U.S. Engineers fed us--things like that.

McKAY: Do you want to talk about the book that you have been doing in Memphis on rewriting history from the women's perspective?

BRIDGES: I could go this way, I was reared in a large family in Mississippi, I was the eldest child, and had five younger brothers. We had a Shetland pony, but to show you that, even though you are the eldest and rank has some privileges; being a



girl, I never got to ride the Shetland pony. That helped to make a feminist out of me, plus the fact that I had a great grandmother who was born in Mississippi in 1823, who lived to vote when she was 97 years old. She was the first woman in Mississippi to vote, and the Memphis Commercial Appeal carried a picture of her saying "Grandmother Berryhill Votes." She made the comment that respectable women never had their pictures in the paper, never had a write up about themselves, except when they were born, when they got married and when they died. She was an exception. She got a story in the paper when she voted.

I lived in this house where I had a great-grandmother, a grandmother and a mother who were extreme feminists, and I remember the call coming through when I was a ten year old child saying that Tennessee had finally voted "Aye", that the suffrage movement was a reality and women could vote even though Mississippi hadn't taken any action. Tennessee's vote made it all possible. My mother was in the kitchen with our black cook, Aunt Della, and she threw down a dish towel and said, "That's it, we're not going to have dinner at home tonight". My father called her up to tell her. I don't know whether he was such an ardent feminist but living in such a household, he didn't have a chance. That's where my interest started. Of course, my great grandmother could remember when there wasn't any Memphis, but she could remember very well coming to the area to trade with the Indians. Naturally, I grew up thinking Memphis was the capitol of Mississippi; I didn't learn that Jackson was until I went to school. I was a rather precocious child, and my health wasn't too good, so they taught me to read when I was four years old. It was just a way to keep me quiet, to keep me



from running them crazy with my questions and to make me stay in bed, so, I would lie in bed and read. I was reading Charles Dickens when I was in the fourth grade, and I read all three volumes of Les Miserables when I was eleven. They tried to tell me I didn't understand it, but I had a little French dictionary which was given to the troops in World War I. It had belonged to an uncle of mine who had gone abroad with the Red Cross. I used it to look up the French phrases, and it may have been a rough translation, but I got the sense of it and read it. I have read it three times since, without acquiring a single new idea. I had to take care of number one, being a girl and being the eldest child, so I was always a rebel. I wasn't too popular with young men in my youth because they said, "Oh, you don't conform! Why you can't do that! You can't be a nonconformist!" And I said, "The heck I can't, I'm doing it." I always did a man's work, held a man's job, worked with men, and got along fine on a buddy-buddy basis, but that was it. I have always thought that anything a man can do, you can find a woman who can do it and she can do it just as well. I didn't say that I could be the mechanic some of my brothers are. I don't say I have artistic talent because I can't draw a straight line. Why, I can't draw a cat's tail that looks like one; so drawing and engineering and all those things, were beyond me. But, I have known women they were not beyond, and they've done very well in those fields. I have always thought why should a female child be deemed of less worth than her brothers? It's just not so. The women in my family told me that all my days, too. I didn't go it alone.

And, I have always read biographies. I kept reading biographies, women helping women, women helping men, women doing things, women creating, women offering their services, women even dying for their country, and



there would be a single footnote in the history book. The more I thought about it, the madder I got, because women have been in the middle of everything. Women went to war with the Romans, I'm sure they did. This word "camp follower", has always made me mad because it is not true. The "camp follower" was a man's daughter, his wife, his sister--women went to war to take care of men. They did the work that's done now by the Army Nurse Corps, and the WAC's and all these different groups, the services of supply. I don't think very many men would have come home from wars, if the women hadn't gone with them and taken care of them. And, they are not too bad in the fighting department, I think. I remember a Queen called Boadicea. She was a holy terror. Incidentally, those Britishers and Celts were just as civilized as the Romans who attacked them. After all, in Bible times the Phoenicians went to the coast of Britain and had tin mines. They knew how to work in metals and all those things. She had chariots with swords on the wheels exactly like those the Syrians had some centuries before, and she really reaped her vengeance upon the Roman army. When she was finally captured because her troops were greatly outnumbered, she committed suicide rather than be taken to Rome as a victim and paraded before the Roman populace. Quite different from Cleopatra!

I remember reading all those things, women were writing, women were drawing and creating, women were making music. I'm quite sure now, after all I have learned over the years, women made civilization while men fought thousands of wars. The story of history is just one war right after another, and really that's not human history at all. Human history is the first person who milked a cow. Human history is the first person that made



a scratch in the soil and put some grass seed down and grew some wheat. Human history is somebody that learned "How-to"--like the Eskimo woman to take some hide and chew it in her own mouth and turn it into leather. History is taking a bone and punching a hole in it and making a needle and with rawhide thongs sewing the leather together. That's how we got to be human beings, and I'm sure women did every bit of it. I'm not too sure they didn't learn to do the work in metals, because with their curiosity and their wonder, "how this will be if I tried so and so", they invented quite a lot of things.

That is what drove me on, I was so mad. Every time I picked up a book I asked, "Why aren't women in here?" I realize that I am limited, furthermore I am old, and I can never write the books I want to. I hope some young person coming after me can write the book I would really like to do, which is a history of the Yellow Fever epidemics in the Mississippi River Valley. A period covering 1805 to 1905, and the last one, the threat of it being in 1905.

The reason I am writing the book now is that I realize my limitations. I may be able to write a book about Women Who Made Memphis History or I may call the book Memphis Women Who Made History. I rather think that may be the final title. It will not by any means cover all the Memphis women who should be remembered, but there won't be any prejudice in it. There will be Indian women and black women and white women of various European and Anglo-Saxon extractions. It will cover the different fields from the suffragists to the ladies who founded St. Joseph's Hospital. Most people don't realize how poor in resources, social resources and social climate we would really be without the magnificent women who did so much. The



Memphis Library is largely the creation of Memphis women and their demands. The Memphis Little Theatre was definitely founded by a woman. In fact, Miss Rosa Lee, who was a Memphis music teacher and the daughter of Old Steam Boat Jim, gave her house to the City of Memphis, and the Memphis Academy of Arts was founded and operated for some years from the Lee home over in Victorian Village before we built the Memphis Art Academy in Overton Park. I seem to remember that Miss Florence McIntyre had a great deal to do with the creation of Memphis Academy of Art; and the Memphis Little Theatre operated out of the Stable Playhouse on the grounds of the old Lee house. It was there until such time as they moved to the Pink Palace. I don't remember all the years in order, but those things were the creation of women. St. Joseph's Hospital was the creation of a woman.

In fact, gifts from the widow of a restauranteur named John Gaston is the reason we have what was really a part of the City of Memphis hospitals, the old John Gaston Hospital. That was the gift of a Memphis woman. This is what I hope to bring out; I hope to write it in this wise, people in the chapters will be in a descending order. The first chapter will be about ten Memphis women, all educators. Then I will come along with nine Memphis women who will probably be women in the arts. One that I am presently working on is called "The Suffragists: A Memphis Quartet" which embraces four Memphis women, and the final chapter will probably end with just one Memphis woman, and I don't know which one she is going to be yet, because it's pretty hard to pick somebody to be the Queen Bee considering the different things that women have done in our city. I would like to mention just one of them who, when I went to the Memphis Public Library, was omitted entirely except for her obituary and then did have a picture. The more I studied,



and contacted people, and found out about her, I became convinced she was no ordinary woman. In the first place, she had worked for a number of years with what was called "fallen women" of that period. She was very sympathetic towards young girls who had had illegitimate children and were trying to find their way in a society which ostracized them. She worked a great deal with women who were driven out of the different houses of prostitution. She also wrote beautiful poetry, two different books. The one that comes to mind immediately is One of Two, a book she wrote with her twin sister, Mrs. Virginia French. Now, Virginia French didn't live in Memphis. She lived in West Tennessee, not too far from Dyersburg. But, Mrs. French wrote beautiful poetry too, and before she married Mr. French she was Virginia Smith from the state of Virginia. She had been the editor of several women's magazines in the South, one in New Orleans and one in Atlanta. Besides, she had written a play that was published and produced, and she had written four novels in addition to several books of poetry. In this book she worked with her sister, Lide Meriwether. In One of Two there are pictures of both women, and you can tell they were twin sisters, the resemblance is striking.

In addition to her work with "fallen women" and her writing here in Memphis, Lide Meriwether, worked with her sister-in-law, Elizabeth A. Meriwether, in the suffragist movement. That was a long time before the parades, before Cary Chapman Catt and the women that you hear associated with it. This was in the late 1860's and 1870's. After Elizabeth left Memphis in 1883, Lide formed an Equal Rights Club in Memphis that had 45 members. She was also the President of the WCTU. In the 1890's she was asked by the suffragist organization to go to all the counties in Tennessee and help to



organize suffrage clubs. You might say she is really the one that organized the suffragist clubs in Tennessee. Of course, the tragedy is that for all of her hard work and the wonderful things that she did for us, she died in 1913, six years before the Suffragist Amendment became law.

She leaves a heritage to us that would be hard to fill because it took real courage in her period, when it was considered indecent for a woman to go out and make a speech in public--for her to go into rural counties and small towns and ask to use the high school auditorium to make a talk, or ask to use one of the church chapels or sanctuaries to make a talk. For her to get up and talk about "equal rights for women"--she kept saying "votes for women" but kept coming back also to these words "equal rights," she had to be really valiant.

Growing up in a household like ours I have naturally been for ERA. It was first put forward in 1923. But, I have been actively working for it one way or another ever since I became an adult in the early 1930's. I can remember plenty of times going to Washington with different women's groups and sitting down and talking with our Senators and our Congressmen, I remember that lip service they gave us; they thought "it was a great thing. And, yes, if it ever came out on the floor they would certainly vote for it." And, you knew all the time they were hoping to God that it never would and they were pretty sure that it never was. The only way that we finally got it on the floor was pretty much due to the Business and Professional Women of the United States and the League of Women Voters. They sent representatives to Detroit, Michigan, and got a woman attorney named Martha Griffiths to run for the United States Congress, and she was elected to the House of Representatives. Her sole task was to get on the proper



committee and have the Equal Rights Amendment brought on the floor. Needless to say, she did do this and she kept us advised. She let us know when it got in committee and we sent letters, in fact, I hesitate to say, but several hundred thousand letters went out of Tennessee alone. I have heard it said that they got three million letters; I don't want that as an exact figure because I really don't know. But, they were flabbergasted, and it did get out of committee after three weeks of hearings. When it reached the Senate, Senator Ham Ervin, (I never can call him Sam because he is such a consummate ham, I call him Senator Ham Ervin), held three weeks of hearings there and held forth about --(and I am going to be rather vulgar here), because he held forth about the horrors of women's bosoms after they were shot on the battlefield. My conclusion, and that of some of the friends who were with me, was, "my bosoms are no more sacred than my brother's guts." I feel that way about it. Needless to say, after three weeks of holding forth, the committee voted, and his was the sole "nay" vote. He hadn't made a convert during his whole hearing. When it came out upon the floor, it passed the Senate by I think, I may be incorrect on this, but I have heard it quoted 84 to 16 nays or 88 to 12 nays. I think the latter figure is right, but I could be wrong about it. Anyway it was an overwhelming majority, and it passed in the House before they had the Senate hearings and before they took the vote in the Senate.

Now we're in the middle of a fight to get it passed. I want to say right here, my research has already convinced me and all the women that worked during those years, the reason women didn't get the suffrage amendment had nothing whatever to do with their position. The liquor interest is what kept women from getting to vote. They spent millions of dollars,



first lobbying in Congress during all those years from the time that the suffragist movement was first introduced in 1878 till it passed in 1919, and then later in the state legislatures. They spent millions of dollars because their idea was that if women ever got to vote, they would support the prohibition amendment. The irony of the situation is that the prohibition amendment passed before the one for suffrage did. They got it anyway.

Women would never have gotten that far, had they not gone out bravely and fought terribly hard to get the different states to support suffrage and win them over. At the time that the amendment passed in 1919, they did have partial suffrage in a number of states, and they had complete suffrage in eleven states. By partial suffrage, I mean legislation had been enacted to allow them to be appointed to certain offices, and they were allowed to vote in municipal elections. In fact, some of that legislation had been passed in Tennessee. We are running up against the same thing in our campaign to get ERA affirmed in the requisite number of states. I don't think they are paying that much attention to Phyllis Schlaffley and the women who are lobbying, but I do think they are paying a vast amount of attention to the tremendous financial interests that are opposed to us--the National Manufacturers Association, the US Chamber of Commerce, and insurance companies of the United States. Their reason is that women have dealt them some blows they never thought they would sustain, such as the judgment on unfair employment practices which was won against the telephone company and which, if they had not gotten some relief, would have cost them a hundred and fifty million dollars; the judgment they got against Mutual of Omaha; and the large judgment which they got against American Aircraft. This leads us into another subject upon which I am presently working, an article called



"How Lord, O long, How Lord". I am paraphrasing that from a speech, a keynote speech that the late Frank Goad Clement made at the Democratic Convention. He ended the speech with both arms high in the air and shouting, "How Long, O Lord, How Long". Did you know the first equal pay for equal work legislation was introduced into the House of Representatives in the United States by a Tennessee Congressman? He was a Republican from East Tennessee; his name was Samuel Mayes Arnell, and he introduced it, March 21, 1870. Later in 1871, I think the time was in May, he was talking to a national suffragist group in Apollo Hall in New York City, and he said the thought of his sunny-faced wife in Tennessee, who had often not been paid what she was worth when she was a young school teacher, had impelled him to take this action, because it seemed to him the most practical way he could aid the seventeen million women who wanted suffrage and who wanted a chance out in the world, and he wished them God-speed in their efforts. After a hundred and seven years, I picked up the Ladies Home Journal of last month, and I read an article that women's earnings approximate 56.5 percent of the earnings of men in comparable jobs. So I don't think we've moved a square inch yet. Even though we have federal legislation, we are not courageous enough to get out and fight. Instead of dealing a blow to A T & T, we should deal a blow to every corporation in the United States. I think we should start right here in Memphis with our three big banks. That would be one step, because I interviewed a young lady and she had a Master's Degree from Harvard School of Business, Harvard Graduate School, and she wanted to get into an officer's Training Program with one of our banks, and they offered her one of their clerical jobs, saying they would give her an opportunity at the officer training some time in the future if she would just



start off in the stenographic pool. She said, "I didn't go to school for ten years to come back and do that." And, she left our city.

I still wish that the people in our country would realize that 51.3 percent of its population is female, and that person to person women are probably just as capable, because you have got some lamentable characters in the shape of men. They aren't all efficient either, but you have some terrible women too. However, person for person, I think they are equal, and the largest untapped resource we have in our whole nation is the American woman. I think how shabbily she was treated when she was the one that initiated the idea of getting out and working to help women and getting equality for women, but she was the 27th to be given suffrage. Twenty-six other nations in the world got a break before American women did.

For instance women, it sounds terrible, they really are considered slaves and personal property, but the women in Saudi Arabia have some privileges that we don't have. They don't have to take their husband's names at all, and they can own their own property. According to the laws in some of our states right now, you can't own your own property. I have studied court records that show women in the past had to sue to acquire title to their own clothing, so I guess we have moved forward a little bit.

In our history, another thing, to me, that is an eternal disgrace--is when the state of New Jersey came into the Union in 1783 or '84, it gave the vote to its women. And they voted until 1807, when their sorry legislators got up and said women hadn't used their votes very well, although they voted in great numbers. They took the vote away from them. The reason was, you can see, that they didn't vote for the legislators in office, I assume, and they got even by taking the vote away. Another thing



that most people don't realize women voted in the thirteen colonies. The women in Virginia were levied upon to supply troops, to clothe them, and to supply things to the army. They also paid taxes, so they had a right to go to the hearings in the Virginia House of Burgesses. They did go, and they did even present petitions if they wanted them heard. Women voted in the New England town meetings, and then suddenly their men thought that they were not worthy of being considered citizens. In fact, Elizabeth Cady Stanton's father disowned her, because she spoke in public. She did have the support of her husband, Dr. Stanton, however, and she had a notable career from 1859 to 1902. Women have literally bled and died for causes they believe in.

The Army Nurse Corps was founded by a woman named Dorothy Dix. The first hospital ship that we ever had was created by Alexander Hamilton's great granddaughter. She was Miss Elizabeth Lee Schuyler (pronounced "Sky-lar").

McKAY: "B", are you part of the project that's trying to write a history for use in the Memphis Public Schools emphasizing the women as well as the men--

BRIDGES: Yes, in fact it was my idea to get it started.

McKAY: Would you like to talk about that a bit?

BRIDGES: Yes, I took that up with the committee. I asked to be chairman of the Women's History Committee for the Women's Resources Center, and I asked them to back me, since they had seventeen member organizations, and if you are going before a group to ask for anything, you've got to have something back of you. The fact that you think it's a good idea won't get you a hearing. We went



first and met with certain members of the school board, Dr. Herenton, I believe, and Mrs. Callie Stevens and Mr. Young, and we took sixteen people and presented different angles there--the outlook of a woman who works, the outlook of a woman who is in politics, the outlook of a young mother who is contemplating our public schools and wants to send her children there later, the outlook of a woman who is creative and in the arts. We made this presentation, and they told us that they would adopt it whether or not we got a formal board motion. We had the backing of Barbara Sonnenburg, and we took it to the Board of Education, and they passed a motion to require the teaching with a fair and accurate representation of the achievements and contributions of both men and women of every race, creed, color and religion. This was to be done even if it involved rewriting the textbooks, revising all teaching outlines, and the acquiring of every needed supplementary material.

Incidentally that motion was enlarged in scope by Dr. Mal Mauncy, and I wondered if he didn't want to jump off the bridge the next day when he saw what he had done. But, it is being implemented, and Dr. Claire Henry, with a staff of twenty-one, has been working on it part-time now for a year and a half. It went into the Memphis schools in the ninth grade last year, but if enough material can be gathered, it is to go into every class from kindergarten to the twelfth grade and even the adult education classes. I have supplied Dr. Henry with a number of bibliographies and a few books. Not very long ago, I came across some material about Anna Ella Carroll who really should be credited with winning the Civil War, and she is not in any of our history books, either. Dr. Henry made the statement that the children studying Tennessee history and American history this year are going to



know about Anna Ella Carroll. She was from the family of Charles Carroll, who was one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence. She was a writer and a woman of some distinction, related to the family of Governor Hicks who was the Governor of Maryland during the beginning of the Civil War. She was wealthy. She was a slaveowner but she was sympathetic to the cause of the Union. She freed her slaves and wrote some very powerful papers about the--one of them was "The Power of the President to Suspend the Right of Habeas Corpus Under War Conditions." And another one was "The Power of Government in Dealing with Rebel Citizens in an Insurrection (a State of Civil War)." She used her influence with Governor Hicks to try to keep Maryland in the union, and Maryland didn't secede. She was sent to St. Louis to do some survey work for Mary Ashton Rice Livermore, who did a lot of work in gathering supplies for the Union Army, medical supplies, food and that sort of thing. She was sent to St. Louis to observe that and while she was there, she saw this tremendous buildup of troops and ships, and she made some inquiry and found out they planned to go down the Mississippi River and take it. She was rather knowledgeable about the South, having been a Southerner all of her life, and she was impelled to sit down and write a long memorandum which advocated the abandonment of the idea, at least temporary abandonment of the idea of a Mississippi River campaign and to undertake a Tennessee River campaign. She pointed out to them that the entry point at Paducah, Kentucky on the Ohio to the Tennessee was less than 250 miles, and that it wouldn't be too difficult to divide the Confederacy. They could take Ft. Henry and Ft. Donelson and come on down to Pittsburg Landing and meet no great opposition. Again she mentioned the fact that the Tennessee River was navigable nine months out of the year for the larg-



est boats that were on the Mississippi at that time, and that they could go as far as Muscle Shoals. She also pointed out to them they could cut four railroads; one was the Memphis and Charleston; another led into Nashville and she quotes the distance there, for instance from Decatur to the Memphis and Charleston line; and from Stevenson, Alabama to cut the line that fed into Chattanooga; and then another one that fed into Nashville. She sent this memorandum to Mr. Hayes, who was the Assistant Secretary of War. He had been the main official who was pushing the Mississippi River campaign. When he read it, he said, "Why this is the first clear outline of a campaign that I've seen." They called a meeting of Abraham Lincoln's cabinet, and her strategy was adopted.

You know, I've read history books, and I believe this is true. I have a copy of this memorandum which Anna Ella Carroll sent to the Assistant Secretary of War, and I believe that campaign was her idea, and she did do it. My reason is that after examining history books, I've seen the Tennessee campaign credited to Stanton, and Stanton wasn't even Secretary of War when it happened, Simon Cameron was, and I have heard it credited to General Grant, and I have heard it credited to Admiral Foote, and I've even had it attributed to Halleck. If that many different people are credited in our history books with originating the Tennessee Campaign, I don't think any of them planned it. The historians don't actually know who did it, not enough to really bring it out.

She was asked by Abraham Lincoln to keep quiet and not say anything about her strategy because if the campaign failed, and it were known that it was the plan of a civilian and a woman, it would cause such harsh criticism, they might have trouble from our Congress getting enough resources



to fight the war.

McKAY: Where did you get your sources for this story about her?

BRIDGES: It's in The History of Women Suffrage and that's interesting too because there are six volumes of this history, and they don't have it out on the shelves in the Memphis Library. It's kept upstairs in boxes. They are huge volumes, and the first two of them were written by Elizabeth Cady Stanton, but Susan B. Anthony helped to get together a lot of the papers. Then the next volumes were written by Matilda Jocelyn Gage with the help of Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and the last two volumes were written by Ida Husted Harper. The reason for that is they completed the writing in 1902. The writing continued from 1893 to 1902. Elizabeth Cady Stanton died in 1902, and Susan B. Anthony was getting quite old because she died well up into her 80's, in 1906. Matilda Jocelyn Gage died in 1913, so Ida Husted Harper was the logical one to bring it to a conclusion. Anna Ella Carroll's story is in The Suffrage History, but it is also in the Congressional Record, because it was discussed in the House of Representatives after the war was over, but no recognition was ever given to her, because she died, Abraham Lincoln was assassinated, and they just never did anything about it. But it was discussed, and it is in a Congressional Record of 1866.

McKAY: I'd like to switch the topic now a little bit. Were you one of the original members or founders of the Women's Resources Center here in Memphis?

BRIDGES: To tell you the honest truth it was my idea. I dreamed it up. But, the practical carrying out



was the work of Mary Robinson. Several of us in town worked to bring it about, but she is the one who said, "Well, let's just don't talk forever, let's get a charter." We had to pass the hat to get the fifty dollars to charter. Some of the other girls who worked on it were Sandy Dickey, Leathia Thomas, Pat Vander Schaff and Carol Lynn Yellin. Then Pat and Carol Lynn more or less dropped out. Sister Mary Ann Guthrie took a hand in it for a while. Later on Sally Mace, she's Sally Phillips now, came in to help. We got a charter and started, and we didn't have a penny.

McKAY: What was the function of the Women's Resources Center?

BRIDGES: Of course, we realized we had to charter as a non-profit organization, but the idea was eventually to give women political impact, because there are any number of women in the Memphis community who are doing worthwhile things, but none of them has a city-wide impact. The biggest organization in town doesn't have it. If you could bring them all together, they would have; and I think, even though we by no means got them all, with just the seventeen we had, they never even thought about turning down the teaching of history; their building that into the entire course content--everything from mathematics, social studies, language, literature and history. The child will not know when he, she, it, is learning women in history. It will just be part of education, which is the way it ought to be. You don't need black studies. You don't need women's studies. For the simple reason now, in most places, it is offered only in colleges and universities, and a great number of the students never take the courses at all. The next is, it is set apart as something unique, when there is nothing separate and unique about it at all.



It's part of the whole human experience, and that's the way it is going to be taught in Memphis, and which, by the way, is the first in the United States to do this. The Women's Resources Center seems to be an idea whose time has come, because there are numerous centers in other areas. I'm not too sure ours is not spread too thin, because we undertook to be all things to all women, and you can't do it. We do have some successes. Our assertiveness training classes have been very popular, in fact, we have to set up more classes every time we offer them. We start with one and wind up with three and have a waiting list. It is pretty limited, but we have managed to get funds to equip a small library, and we do have a considerable collection of pamphlets, booklets, tracts and articles of interest to women on very many subjects. Students have already found them useful in writing term papers and as research and resource material. There are reference and referral files to take care of telephone calls that come in. We don't say that we can take care of them, but we can put them in touch with somebody who can, and we have a record of doing pretty well by that. We've never been able to get it all together. At one time we had personnel and no equipment at all, then we got some money and bought some equipment and didn't have any personnel. Now we have limited personnel and some equipment. We print programs and newsletters for other women's organizations. We'll set up a class on almost any subject, if they can get as many as ten and can find a teacher for it. We have seminars and workshops and meetings. We write letters on various things to different groups. We're precluded from actual political activities by a non-profit organization status, but we do engage in political education. If women could really catch the resource idea, it could be as big as the women in Memphis wanted



to make it. There's no reason why it shouldn't have every women's group in the city in it, because it operates also without bias or prejudice of any kind. Any woman who wants to be a member can be a member. We've kept the dues low so that they can afford it. You can get a five dollar newsletter subscription or a seven dollar and fifty cent associate membership or a fifteen dollar contributing membership. We have organizational members which run from as little as ten dollars for an organization with twenty-five members to fifty dollars for an organization with over a hundred members. I don't know what the future of it is, but that is what I can think of.

McKAY: What about the International Women's Year activities in Tennessee?

BRIDGES: I think that the IWY and the IWD (International Women's Decade) have a purpose all right, because the twenty-first century is on us. Some of the younger women that are in IWY are going to be very active middle aged women when the twenty-first century arrives, and maybe they can help get us ready for it. I don't know that they came out with anything original, but the fact that they could meet together and, in Tennessee, harmoniously agree upon eighteen different things important to women, to me, is a significant step, because they came from almost every social and economic strata. They had a large representation of blacks, which is the first time that we have had so many at a meeting. Even though I personally did not go because I can't take large groups any more, and if I attended such meetings and got excited, I'd come home and be sick in bed for three days, but it's worthwhile. I even think, though their little sixty page book cannot possibly have real



impact, it may get together the names of people with thumbnail biographies that will lead to a lot of further research, and maybe the publishing of fifty or a hundred books. It's entirely possible, because that little book of mine won't scratch the surface on Memphis women alone, and Memphis women haven't been the only ones in Tennessee who did things. I don't know what will come out of the national meeting in Houston, I can't say. There have been some highly disruptive meetings in Florida and in Oklahoma, and, in fact, they never even acted on the resolutions in both states. But I look for a certain amount of common sense to prevail in a great many of the measures that will come forward. I'm sure they will agree that they've got to go back and help the League of Women Voters raise a million dollars and get ERA passed. I'm pretty sure they are going to make a strong stand on the creation of day care centers, not necessarily just for poor women and not necessarily federally supported, but because they are a reality and a needed commodity in our cities--a needed agency. And people, who have had them under observation, realize that the children are much better cared for in a day care center than they are by a mother who has to take them in a car while she runs all day long, taking this little child to a music lesson and that one to kindergarten and another one to high school and drags the poor little thing by the arm all the way through the supermarket while she has to shop and never has a minute to herself. Even the woman who keeps house could utilize the facilities of a day care center. Maybe not on an everyday basis, but on a part-time basis, on days that she needs to be out.

The move to give the housewife social security though, I think, needs a lot more investigation. Since it really isn't practical, I realize that in the first place, how can you set a value on a wife's services so that



you can base the tax necessary to acquire an equal social security amount for her? And then the next idea or next phase of it is how do you get a husband and the men in this world to agree to pay 11.7 percent of their salary or some equivalent salary, imaginary salary, that is set up for the wife? How do you get a man to pay that much of his income in taxes, and how do you get his employer to pay a like amount when the wife is not his employee? So I don't know that social security for the housewife, even though it was one of the motions passed, is going to be a reality in the foreseeable future. But there is another phase which might be considered, and I'm sorry it wasn't brought up, and if I were equal to going to Houston, I would bring it up. Perhaps some of the women attorneys in our country have thought about it and will do it. I was talking to one this morning. She might do it. We have a program where you can set aside as much as \$2,500 of your annual income, if you are the affluent, tax-free to create an income reserve for your old age. That could be changed to setting it up for any amount for even as little as fifty dollars a year. Most people don't realize that if you put just \$10,000 in an ordinary savings account and leave it alone with the interest increment, that \$10,000 will take care of you when you are 65. Five thousand dollars will yield you approximately fifty, if you put it in when you are very young and don't take it out until you are 65 or 70. Money makes money, and I think that something needs to be done for the housewife. They are going to continue to bear down on the enforcement of the equal employment opportunity act, which is back to that subject that I was talking about earlier--equal pay for equal work. There are a lot of other ideas but they are the ones that come to mind. Another one is the injustice of inheritance laws, inheritance tax laws. A wife



helped to contribute to the wealth of her husband, but she has to pay inheritance tax on the part of the estate that she gets from her husband, and that's grossly unfair. A sixty thousand exemption for a married couple or the widow of a man, which exists both in the federal government and in Tennessee, used to be considered quite liberal, but when you look at just the price of a three bedroom house today, you realize that sixty thousand dollars is no longer very much of an exemption. It should be something like two hundred and fifty thousand. However, I can point out to you injustices toward women much greater than that.

In Tennessee, under the inheritance tax law, there are Class A inheritances and Class B inheritances. The Class A inheritors are married people, the widows or widowers, and theirs can go down, they have the sixty thousand dollar exemption, and their property can go down by lineal descent, and unless they have a fairly large estate, there's not a great deal of tax involved. But, a single person has only one thousand dollars' exemption, and that's grossly unfair, and people do die sometimes in their forties, and they leave aged parents, and there is no way in the world for a parent to get the social security their child earned. It's not available for them. Although in the case of a widow, social security is available for her children, sometimes until they are 22 years of age if they are in school. And, to me, those things are grossly unfair. We could do an awful lot of work on these laws. Another thing that they haven't brought up, even though they did request some revision in the marriage laws, is to get to work and pass the uniform marriage laws which were proposed by the American Bar Association in 1970. If we had the same marriage laws in all fifty states, a great many of our social difficulties would be wiped out in one stroke. It



has been fascinating to me all these years to understand how the dollar--"the almighty dollar"--influences everything. We've got uniform bankruptcy acts, we've got uniform negotiable instrument acts, we've got uniform bulk sale acts, all of which concern property. But, where it concerns human beings and human rights, we can't get any uniform acts that are the same in all fifty states.

This is especially difficult, which women attorneys will bear out, in Memphis. Because a man needs to go only ten miles down to Mississippi or across the river to West Memphis, and he is under an entirely different set of laws. I don't think that's fair. I think some of those needs will be put forward in the IWD meeting in Houston in the fall. And some of that discussion was heard at meetings in Nashville and at Clarksville. At least it got women thinking. That's about all I can say on IWY and IWD.

The point is that from the failing hands of women, there has passed a charge which was carried on by another generation of women. I threw out this thing I have talked about, the suffrage thing, but women who started to work in 1848 weren't around in 1919, nevertheless, the movement was carried forward. Women who were around in 1923, 53 years ago, when we first introduced ERA, are not too active now, and they may not be around at all when it really comes about, but I have no doubt whatever that it will be carried on. Everything that we have done, has not been for ourselves. Everything that our mothers, grandmothers, and great grandmothers did was not just for themselves. It was for those coming after. I believe the future could never be better than the outlook for the future is right now.











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